



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-12-70
Meeting 12-29
August 22, 2012

AGENDA ITEM 8

AGENDA ITEM

Consideration of Adding the Russian Ridge (Mindego Ranch Area) Use and Management Plan Amendment as a New Key Project to the District Fiscal Year 2012-13 Action Plan

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. J. [unclear]".

Approve the addition of the Russian Ridge (Mindego Ranch Area) Use and Management Plan Amendment as a New Key Project to the District Fiscal Year 2012-13 Action Plan within the Planning Department.

SUMMARY

An amendment to the existing Russian Ridge Use and Management (U&M) Plan is necessary to facilitate effective stewardship of Mindego Ranch, which includes re-introduction of cattle grazing. The proposed U&M Plan Amendment includes upgrades to the livestock water system infrastructure to allow for grazing, enhancements to ponds to improve habitat for sensitive species, and road repairs to allow patrol and maintenance access. The U&M Plan Amendment will also address provisions for future public access.

DISCUSSION

Mindego Ranch was purchased by the District as an addition to Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve in July of 2008 (see report R-08-38 and Attachment A, Project Area Map). In 2011, the District entered into a partnership with POST to plan and implement appropriate public access to the Mindego Ranch area (known as the Mindego Gateway Project; see reports R-11-82 and R-12-37). Other critical use and management actions, including pond improvements, repairs to existing access roads, upgrades to and installation of new grazing infrastructure, and re-activation of a grazing operation, are required to effectively steward this important and unique property. These actions must be expedited to address permitting issues for the Mindego Gateway Project. Staff have worked closely with the San Mateo County Planning Department, Farm Bureau, and Agricultural Advisory Committee, and propose that cattle grazing be reintroduced at Mindego Ranch prior to allowing public access on the proposed Mindego Hill Trail. At its August 13, 2012, the Agricultural Advisory Committee reviewed and supported this proposal. Permits for the Mindego Gateway Project will be considered by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors at their September 11, 2012 meeting. Planning, Natural Resources, and Real Property Department staff have developed a work plan to begin the grazing operation contracting process by 2014. Expected elements of the proposed U&M Plan Amendment are

summarized below and, if approved by the Board, would be presented to the U&M Committee in detail this fall.

Grazing Infrastructure. Returning livestock to the property is a high priority for resource management and policy reasons. Livestock grazing controls invasive plant species, reduces wildfire hazard, and maintains open grassland areas. Furthermore, District policy encourages active agricultural operations within the Coastside Protection Area. As part of the consultation process with the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and Agricultural Advisory Committee for the Mindego Gateway Project, the District committed to making Mindego Ranch available to a grazing operation by 2014. In order to effectively manage cattle on Mindego Ranch, extensive upgrades to the existing stock water system are necessary. These and other infrastructure improvements are detailed in a Grazing Management Plan for Mindego Ranch which would be incorporated into the proposed U&M Plan Amendment and implemented by Natural Resource and Operations staff.

Pond Improvements. Proposed actions would protect and enhance habitat for the San Francisco garter snake and other sensitive aquatic species. These actions would include: installing cattle exclusion fencing around portions of ponds, draining Mindego Lake to eradicate non-native fish and bullfrogs, and removing sediment and vegetation to increase water storage and open aquatic habitat. A Habitat Management Plan for the Mindego Ranch ponds that incorporate these actions is currently being finalized by Biosearch Associates (see report R-11-37). Pond improvements would be implemented by staff from the Natural Resources and Operations departments.

Public Access. Existing plans for public access to Mindego Ranch would include a trail to the top of Mindego Hill and to the POST Council Circle. Access to the POST Council Circle would be via the existing unimproved ranch driveway and limited to hikers and equestrians only, with off-trail use prohibited. Additional public access would be evaluated as part of the U&M Plan Amendment planning process and may include docent-led hikes in biologically-sensitive habitat areas.

Road Repair and Maintenance. Access roads on Mindego Ranch require repairs, including culvert installation and correction of fill failure to widen the road surface. These measures are intended to reduce sedimentation to the aquatic environment and provide adequate year-round patrol access. A Road and Trail Inventory would be prepared by an engineering geologist in summer/fall 2012 to describe and prioritize the necessary road repairs. Ongoing road maintenance needs would also be identified and included in the proposed U&M Plan Amendment.

Ongoing Operations. Ongoing resource management activities required to provide proper stewardship of Mindego Ranch include vegetation management, invasive plant control, native plant seeding and wildfire hazard management. Patrol actions may include routine site checks and emergency response. Planning and Operations staff will collaborate to ensure future operations actions are included in the proposed U&M Plan Amendment.

FISCAL IMPACT

If this item is approved by the Board, it is anticipated that approximately \$60,000 will be needed to prepare an environmental review document, including surveys and reports necessary to support the findings in the document. Funds from recently deferred projects would be

reallocated to provide funds for this project as part of the FY2012-13 midyear budget adjustment.

BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

It is anticipated that the proposed U&M Plan Amendment would be presented in detail for consideration and review to the Use and Management Committee in October 2012.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice has been provided as required by the Brown Act and the Coastside Service Plan. No additional notice is required.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Initiating the planning phase of a proposed new project does not constitute a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as it will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment [CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2)]. Any proposed future actions will be subject to environmental review to be completed at a later date, prior to any physical implementation.

NEXT STEPS

If this item is approved by the Board, Planning and Natural Resources Department staff would prepare a U&M Plan Amendment to include the actions described above. Early stakeholder and coastal agency input, including input from the San Mateo County Farm Bureau, would occur in summer/fall 2012, and the proposed U&M Plan Amendment would be presented to the Use and Management Committee in October 2012. It is expected that the U&M Plan Amendment would be brought to the full Board for consideration and tentative approval in December 2012, which would initiate the CEQA and regulatory agency permitting processes. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Recovery Permit will be required to implement the management actions. Based on past experience, it is anticipated that the permitting process for this and all other permits will require more than one calendar year to complete. Initial project implementation, including livestock water infrastructure upgrades and road repair work, could begin as early as summer 2014.

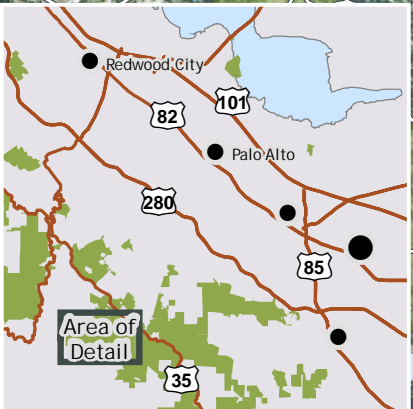
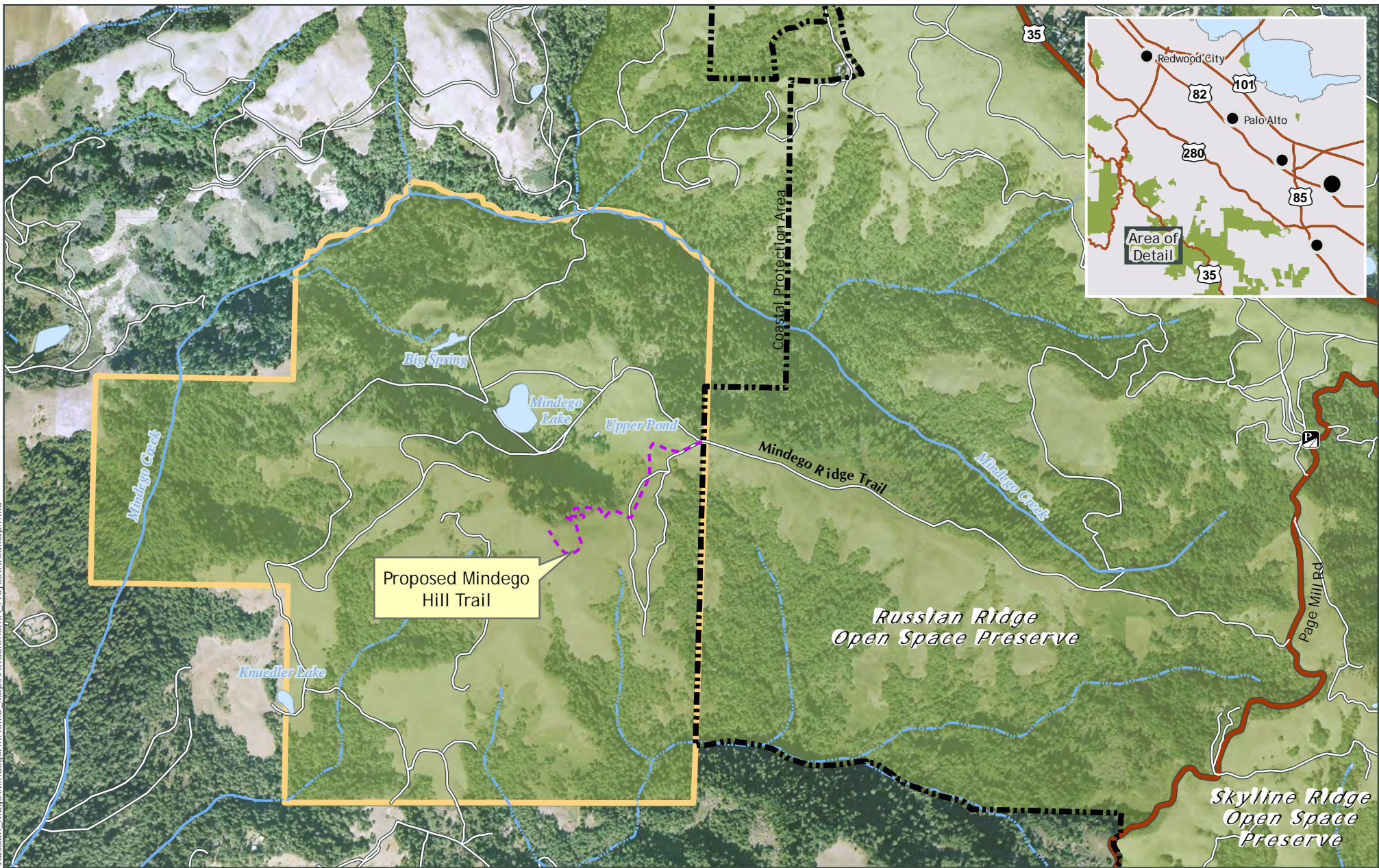
Attachments:

1. Project Area Map









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Attachment A *Project Area Map*

-  MROSD Preserves
-  Perennial Stream
-  Coastal Protection Area
-  Other or Private Land
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Mindego Ranch Boundary
-  Roadside Parking
-  Proposed Mindego Hill Trail

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)



August, 2012

